

The Prince Ch. XV

The Reputation of a Ruler

by Niccolò Machiavelli

I wish now to speak about how a ruler should treat his friends and subjects. Many famous authors have written about this, and I am afraid you will think that I am being arrogant for writing about it again. This is especially so since what I have to say is so different from what the famous authors of the past have said. They have written about imaginary governments which don't exist in reality. To me it seems more useful to write down the simple truth of the matter. There is such a great difference between how human beings actually live and how they ought to live. A ruler who ignores what is being done by human beings in order to think about what ought to be done will bring about his own destruction. Since a ruler always has subjects who are not good, he too must learn how not to be good.

Let us therefore stop talking about imaginary things and start saying what is true about a ruler. All men, rulers included, are said to have qualities for which they are praised and blamed. Some men are called generous, others stingy, some cruel, others merciful, some treacherous, others faithful, some cowardly, others brave, some religious, others unreligious, and so on. Everyone will agree that it would be nice if a ruler had all the qualities mentioned above that are considered good. However, it is impossible to have them all, for human nature is not like that. The ruler should be smart enough not to get the reputation for having those bad qualities which could cause him to lose power. As for the other bad qualities, he should not worry too much about his reputation. If he thinks about the matter carefully, he will see that if he tries to acquire certain qualities which seem good he might lose his power. On the other hand, some other qualities which seem bad will help him to increase his power.

The Prince Ch. XVII

Should a Ruler be Loved or Feared?

by Niccolò Machiavelli

Is it better for a ruler to be loved by his people or feared by them? Most people want to be both feared and loved. However, it is hard to be both feared and loved, and if you can't have both, it is safer to be feared. This is so because human beings generally have the following characteristics: they are ungrateful, undependable, liars, cheats, cowards, and greedy for money. As long as you take care of them, they will do whatever you want. They will pretend they love you. They will offer to give you their property and their children, if they are sure you neither want them nor need them. If you ever do need them, they will turn against you. Since their friendship has been bought for a price, and does not depend on their goodness, you cannot count on it.

They will not hesitate to hurt their friends if they think they can profit by it. They will break the bonds of friendship every time they think it is in their interest to do so. However, they will not betray you if they fear you and think you can punish them. Although a ruler must make himself feared, he should not also make himself hated. It is, in fact, possible for a ruler to be feared but not hated. He can do this by keeping his hands off the women and property of his subjects. If he has to kill someone, he should do it when he has a good reason for it. Anyway, most men will hate you more if you take their property than if you kill their friends and relatives.